

THE CLAIMS DEFINING THE INVENTION ARE AS FOLLOWS:

1. A hand operated shirring machine including;
a body through which a stuffing tube covered in casing may pass,
a casing engaging means that engages said casing as the shirring machine is pushed along said stuffing tube from its discharge end so that said casing is drawn onto said stuffing tube and that disengages from said casing when it is pulled in the opposite direction, and
grasping means for grasping said shirring machine to manually move it back and forth along said stuffing tube.
2. A hand operated shirring machine as claimed in claim 1 wherein said casing engaging means includes a plurality of annular segments arranged about the circumference of said stuffing tube.
3. A hand operated shirring machine as claimed in claim 1 wherein said casing engaging means includes a plurality of fingers pivotally attached to said body arranged about the circumference of said stuffing tube.
4. A hand operated shirring machine as claimed in claim 3 wherein said fingers are connected to a continuous circumferential spring biased to draw said fingers towards said stuffing tube.
5. A hand operated shirring machine as claimed in claim 1 wherein said casing engaging means includes a spring mounted member located in a tapered section on said body wherein as said member slides longitudinally with respect to said body within said tapered section said member is forced to grip the casing when said member is moved in one direction and release the casing when said member is moved in an opposite direction.

6. A hand operated shirring machine as claimed in of any one of the preceding claims wherein said body is tubular.
7. A hand operated shirring machine as claimed in claim 1 wherein said body includes a first tubular section having disengaging means, a second tubular section having casing engaging means interfacing with said tapered portion, wherein first and second tubular sections are slidably movable a predetermined distance relative to each other so that said casing engaging means is forced to grip said casing when said first and second tubular sections are slid apart from each other and disengaging means acts upon said casing engagement means to release said casing when said first and second tubular sections are slid towards each other.
8. A hand operated shirring machine as claimed in claim 7 wherein said casing engaging means includes a plurality of annular segments arranged about the circumference of said stuffing tube.
9. A hand operated shirring machine as claimed in claim 7 wherein said casing engaging means includes a plurality of fingers pivotally attached to said second tubular section arranged about the circumference of said stuffing tube.
10. A hand operated shirring machine as claimed in claim 9 wherein said fingers are connected to a continuous circumferential spring biased to draw said fingers towards said stuffing tube.
11. A hand operated shirring machine as claimed in any one of the preceding claims wherein said grasping means include a pair of handles.
12. A method of loading casing onto a stuffing tube including the steps of:

inserting a tapered mandrel into a discharge end of said stuffing tube;
drawing an end of said casing over said mandrel and sliding said end of casing onto the discharge end of said stuffing tube; and
manually operating the hand operated shirring machine as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 11 to draw casing onto said stuffing tube forming a region of bunched casing away from said discharge end of said stuffing tube.

13. A hand operated shirring machine as claimed in claim 1, substantially as herein described with reference to the accompanying drawings.
14. A hand operated shirring machine substantially as herein described with reference to any one of the embodiments of the invention illustrated in the accompanying drawings.
15. A method of loading casing onto a stuffing tube substantially as herein described with reference to any one of the embodiments of the invention illustrated in the accompanying drawings.